

Magic Power: changing gender dynamics and sex-enhancement practices among youths in Makassar, Indonesia

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This paper examines changing sexualities and gender relations as they are reflected in the use of sexual enhancement products by young women and men in the eastern Indonesian city of Makassar. To examine the relationships between the use of these products and socially sanctioned gender roles, their 'gender scripts' were studied – the assumptions embedded in the products' design and advertising. What kinds of femininity and masculinity are expressed through their use? It was found that the most popular products – 'magic tissues' that promise to prolong erections and a 'neotraditional' vaginal wash that promises to cleanse, perfume, and tighten vaginas – espouse the dual purpose of promoting sexual pleasure and hygiene. While it was found that the images in advertising to reflect changing gender relations in the field site, this research also points to enduring gender scripts in Indonesian culture: men should be virile, women should be clean and attractive.

Keywords: gender; sexuality; Indonesia

Introduction

In the wake of the *reformasi* (political reforms) and the collapse of the economy in the late 1990s, young people in Indonesia live in a rapidly changing society where they must navigate changing sexual as well as religious mores. When asked in a recent survey to name the main problems confronting Indonesian youth, over half of 3565 young respondents identified 'free sex' (Parker and Nilan 2013). Parker and Nilan (2013) suggest that young people in Indonesia remain fairly conservative; their informants all stated that they eventually want to marry and have a family. Young women are expected to be 'good', docile, and to protect their virginity; if they do have boyfriends, they are expected to keep it secret (Bennett 2005). In contrast, young men are generally encouraged to be sexually active before marriage. They are expected to pursue girls, as reflected in the phrase *cari cewek* ('he's out looking for girls') and reinforced by media images of male heroes with superhuman physical strength, sex drive and bravery (Nilan 2009).

Handajani (2008) argues that changing gender roles and the mixed messages young men receive are fuelling a 'crisis of masculinity' in Indonesia. Increasingly, young women want to be educated and have their own places, jobs and careers. They do not see their future primarily as an *ibu* – the mother of the household responsible for the home while supporting her husband who operates in the outside world (for constructions of the ideal mother under the New Order regime, see for example Robinson 2009; Suryakusuma 2004; Sunindyo 1998). Utomo (2002) reports that middle-class women in Jakarta now

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